

CHAPTER NINE

Special Hunting and Safety Concerns

Learning Objectives

At the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- A. Recognize the dangers of and identify safety tips for treestand hunting.
- B. Identify rules for safe and responsible use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs).
- C. Identify the primary cause of turkey hunting accidents and list precautions to take when hunting turkey.
- D. Differentiate between black bears and grizzly bears.
- E. Know precautions to minimize the chances of an encounter with a bear and describe the possible responses in the event of an encounter.
- F. List five things you can do if you have to leave your game carcass in bear country.

Introduction

In addition to the many challenges presented by hunting, there are a few special hunting situations that call for extra precautions and create very specific safety concerns. Using a treestand or an ATV safely, for example, requires that you have special knowledge and skills. Turkey hunting also presents some unique safety concerns. And for those of us hunting in Montana, perhaps no challenge is of greater concern than the presence of grizzly bears. In this chapter, you will learn about these different situations and how to behave responsibly and safely.

A. Treestand hunting

Using **treestands** for hunting is an effective and increasingly popular way to hunt. Hunting from an elevated position has many advantages; it can improve a hunter's field of view at the same time that it reduces the chances of being detected by game.

But there are also risks, the most serious of which is the risk of falling from the stand. In fact, several states report that the number of treestand falls now rivals firearm accidents as the leading cause of serious hunting injuries. One out of every three hunters using a treestand falls during his or her lifetime.

Make no mistake, if you fall chances are you will get hurt! Injuries can range from bumps and bruises to broken bones and permanent damage. Some falls even result in death. Learn proper, safe treestand methods and practice them every time your feet leave the ground.

Most falls occur while a hunter is either climbing up or down a tree, and particularly when he or she is stepping onto or off of a platform. Other mishaps occur when hunters fall out of the treestand itself or as a result of equipment failure.

Treestand types

Not all treestands are alike. The following list provides a short description of some of the well-known types:

Key Words

Treestand

Grizzly bear

ATV

Black bear

🦋 **Fixed position stands.** These stands are designed to be placed on a trunk and remain secured in that spot.

🦋 **Vertical ladder stands.** These have an integral ladder that provides support to the shooting platform, as well as the means to climb to the stand. The ladder “legs” extend at a slight angle out from the stand and tree trunk, and are secured to the trunk with supporting arms and belts.

🦋 **Climbing stands.** The climber is designed to “walk” up a tree trunk with the hunter to the desired elevation. This category includes “banded climbers.”

🦋 **Permanent stands.** These are *not* recommended and are illegal on public lands. They are made from wood or a combination of materials. They are exposed to weather and may deteriorate, and they are also subject to use by other hunters. You should never trust a permanent treestand that was built by someone else.

Safety tips

Here are 13 common-sense rules to prevent treestand accidents:

1. Purchase a treestand from a reputable manufacturer whose stands have a proven safety record and learn how to properly climb it.
2. Make sure your climbing treestand is angled into the tree when you first attach it to the trunk. Then, as you climb up the tapering trunk, the platform will level out and hold stable against the tree. Always wear a climbing rope or strap when ascending or descending.
3. Buy a climbing treestand with a shooting bar all the way around the platform if you have a tendency to fall asleep while sitting and waiting.
4. Wear a safety harness to prevent you from falling out of the treestand if you should fall asleep or slip and fall.
5. If you use tree steps to get to and from the stand, be sure each step is securely attached to the tree before you begin to climb. Also, use a safety strap around the tree you climb.
6. Use some type of haul line for your firearm or bow. Never



Ladder treestand



Climbing steps

Each year, treestand accidents:

- Result in an average of ten fatalities.
- Permanently disable an average of 30 people.
- Temporarily injure over 600 hunters.
- Involve, without injury, 2,000 to 3,000 more hunters.



Use a haul line.

carry your bow or firearm into the tree with you as you climb unless your stand is equipped with racks for this purpose.

7. Unload your firearm before pulling it up to, or lowering it from, the treestand.
8. Make sure your treestand is firmly attached to the tree before you walk out on the end of the stand or stand on either side of the platform.
9. Test your stand prior to the beginning of the hunting season. Attach it to a tree and climb up or down the tree with it before actually taking it to the woods for a hunt. Be aware of any peculiarities the stand may have.
10. Never put more than one person in a stand at a time unless a stand is specifically designed by the manufacturer to hold more than one person.
11. Never trust a permanent treestand. They may be rotten and are unreliable and dangerous.
12. Step down onto the stand from above while securely holding onto the tree. If the stand falls away, you are less likely to go with it.
13. ALWAYS tell someone where you are hunting and where your treestand is located.



B. What about using all terrain vehicles while hunting?



More and more hunters are using all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). When used properly and responsibly, ATVs can be very useful. For example, with an ATV you can travel quickly to remote areas that might otherwise not be accessible, or you can quickly and easily pack out a kill. But these vehicles can also be dangerous. If you decide to use an ATV, take the time before your hunt to learn how to use the vehicle safely and responsibly. Also be sure to check with your local or regional land management agency to find out what restrictions apply to ATV use and where.

ATV safety

Follow these rules to operate an ATV safely:

-  **Always wear a helmet.** A helmet protects your head from serious injury in the event of a crash. Also, wear protective glasses or goggles, gloves and appropriate footwear.
-  **Know how to properly operate an ATV.** Read and follow all manufacturer's guidelines. Take an ATV operator's course from Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

- ❖ **Never overload your ATV.** An ATV should be limited to one person. Additional gear should be limited and loads balanced.
- ❖ **Watch your speed.** Too many accidents occur because of high speed or recklessness. Maintain a slow to moderate speed and exercise caution while turning.
- ❖ **Use the buddy system.** Travel in groups and make sure nobody is left behind. Look over your shoulder to check on your partners frequently.
- ❖ **Think safety and be prepared.** Be sure that riding conditions are safe before traveling. Always carry a first-aid kit and basic repair tools.

ATV responsibility

People who misuse ATVs disturb wildlife and damage roads, trails and the environment. The noise or presence of an ATV may also annoy or aggravate other people. In response, private land-owners and public land managers may restrict motorized travel to particular areas.

Follow these rules to operate an ATV responsibly:

- ❖ **Use good judgment.**
- ❖ **Know and follow all regulations and laws** regarding ATVs.
- ❖ **Carry firearms unloaded and cased, or on a gun rack.**
- ❖ **Travel only on trails** designated for motorized use. NOTE: ATVs cannot be used in roadless areas.
- ❖ **Avoid damage to the land.** Stay out of streams, wet meadows and steep terrain.
- ❖ **Never chase or otherwise harass wildlife.**
- ❖ **Respect other hunters.** Do not ride your ATV during prime hunting hours or in areas where other people are hunting.
- ❖ **Yield the right of way** if you encounter other hunters on foot or with pack animals. Pull to the side of the trail, turn off your engine and allow them to pass.
- ❖ **Keep your speed down** to minimize dust and noise.



The only safe way to carry a firearm on an ATV is unloaded and cased or on a gun rack.



Source: Ohio Division of Wildlife

Avoid wearing clothing colored similar to the turkey's natural coloring (red, white, blue or black).











C. Turkey hunting

Turkey hunting continues to be very popular. Unfortunately, turkey hunting can be dangerous. In fact, each year a significant percentage of hunting-related shooting accidents involve turkey hunters—as much as 25-30% of all hunting-related shooting accidents—in those states with many turkeys and turkey hunters.

Without question, the number one cause of turkey-hunting incidents is hunters failing to positively identify their target before shooting. The unique nature of turkey hunting explains this problem: hunters dress in full camouflage, hide, and then make turkey sounds to attract other turkeys. Naturally, they also attract other hunters who are looking for turkeys to shoot!

ALWAYS identify your target before you shoot!

Learn and follow the turkey hunting safety tips listed below to ensure a safe and enjoyable hunting experience:

-  **Positively identify your target.** Be absolutely certain it's a turkey before you pull the trigger. The bird should be fully and clearly visible. The shot path to the bird and beyond should be safe.
-  **Never stalk a turkey or turkey sounds.** Movement or sounds you think are a turkey may be another hunter. Be patient. Take up a calling location and let the bird come to you. Sneaking in on another hunter is asking for trouble.
-  **Assume every noise and movement** is another hunter, not a turkey.
-  **Protect your back!** Select a large tree, rock or other substantial natural barrier while calling. Sit with your back against this object. Hunt in open woods so you can easily see approaching hunters.
-  **Shout "STOP!" to alert approaching hunters.** Never move, wave or make turkey sounds to alert hunters of your position.
-  **Eliminate red, white, blue and black colors** from your clothing. These colors are found on the head, neck and body of mature gobblers.
-  **Pre-select a zone of fire.** Shoot at a turkey only in that predetermined zone—and only when you're certain it is safe to do so. Agree upon these zones with your hunting companions before the hunt.
-  **Choose safe and responsible hunting companions.** Know where they are at all times.

**They both
sound just
like turkeys,
and they both
know they
will have to
shoot fast.**

Stalking Stinks!



*Most turkey hunting injuries happen when one hunter stalks another.
Don't stalk turkeys! It doesn't work and it's dangerous.*

To safely hunt a turkey:


- Assume any noise is made by a human.
- Never wear turkey colors — red, blue, black or white.
- Call only with a large tree at your back.
- Drape an orange vest around a tree near your calling location so that other hunters know you're there.


**Successful turkey
hunters sit and call.**

If you see another hunter:

- DON'T MOVE!
- Don't wave, whistle or make turkey or animal sounds to attract his or her attention.

Be Sure of your Target ... and Beyond!

 **Wear hunter orange** when entering or leaving your turkey hunting area.

 **Practice courtesy and self-control at all times.** Observe all written and unwritten rules of safe turkey hunting. Remain calm and exercise good judgment before taking the shot. Good hunting habits prevent shooting accidents!

D. Hunting in bear country

Hunters in Montana are hunting in bear country. And not just any bear country, but grizzly bear country! Take precautions to minimize the possibility of a confrontation with a bear and in the event of a confrontation, know what to do.

Bear identification

Because grizzly bears cannot be legally hunted in Montana, you must be able to tell the difference between a grizzly and a black bear. Follow these three simple steps to ensure that you can hunt safely and legally in Montana's bear country:

1. Learn how to identify bears.
2. Be absolutely sure of your target.
3. If in doubt, don't shoot.



Black Bear



Grizzly Bear

Black bear hunters are required to pass a bear identification test before they can receive a bear-hunting license. The identification program is intended to prevent mistaken killings of federally protected grizzly bears and help Montana maintain its black bear season. There are two ways to take the bear identification course and to receive certification:

- 🐾 On-line, at Fish, Wildlife & Parks' web site fwp.state.mt.us;
- or,
- 🐾 By mail. Forms are available at any Fish, Wildlife & Parks office or license agent.

Be Bear Aware!

Grizzlies can be found throughout Montana. Due to recovery efforts, grizzly bear populations are expanding and bears are re-colonizing historic ranges. This means that hunters are more likely to run into grizzly bears in more places when out in the field!

The very act of hunting puts hunters at an increased risk of encountering grizzlies; elk bugling, game calls and cover scents attract not only game, but also bears.

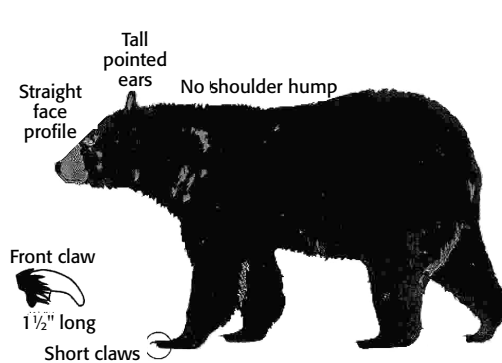
Tips for hunting in grizzly country:

- 🐾 If you hunt in grizzly country leave detailed plans with someone and check-in periodically.
- 🐾 Hunting partners should share details of their hunt plans and have a check-in or communication system.
- 🐾 Pay attention to fresh bear sign. Look for bear tracks, scat and concentrations of natural foods. Use caution when hunting areas that have evidence of bear activity or areas with scavenging birds such as magpies, ravens or crows.

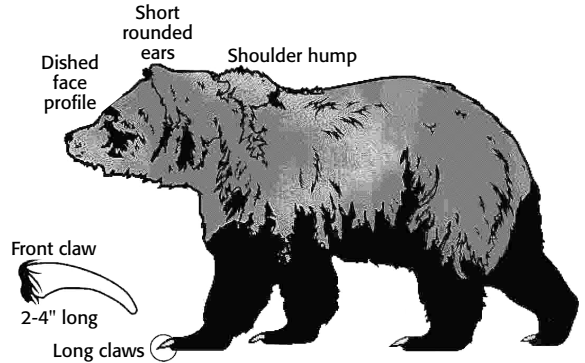
BEAR HUNTERS!

If you are going to hunt black bears, you must know the bear characteristics!

Look for a combination of characteristics



BLACK BEAR



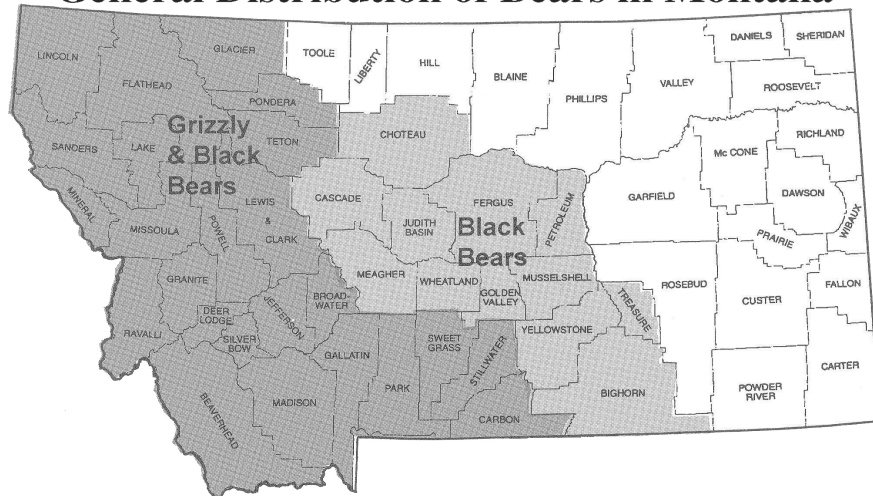
GRIZZLY BEAR

Color and size can be misleading

Learn how to identify bears. Visit FWP's new bear identification website at fwp.state.mt.us/bearid



General Distribution of Bears in Montana





🐾 Communicate with other hunters and let them know when grizzly bears have been seen and/or fresh sign has been observed.

🐾 Some bears have learned to associate gunshots with the availability of a carcass or gut pile — they may move to your kill.

Most grizzly bears will leave an area if they sense human presence. Hunters who observe a grizzly bear or suspect a bear is nearby should leave the area. If by chance you do encounter a grizzly:

🐾 **Stay calm.**

🐾 **Do not run!**

🐾 **Assess the situation.**

- Is the bear aware of you and threatening?
- Is it fleeing?
- Is it unaware of your presence?

🐾 Keep the bear in sight as you back away and leave the area.

E. What should I do if I'm attacked?

Before you head into the field, mentally rehearse a worst-case scenario with a grizzly bear—you are more likely to be able to respond appropriately if you have imagined an encounter and mentally practiced a response than you are if you have never tried to think your way through such an event.

“If the mind has never been there before, the body does not know how to respond.”

When hunting in grizzly country, carry bear pepper spray. Keep the spray within reach and be familiar with the firing mechanism. In sudden encounters pepper spray has proven to be a valuable deterrent. Grizzly bears sprayed in the face at very close range often stop attacking and are less likely to inflict serious injury.

Use a firearm only if bear pepper spray is unavailable. Bears wounded with an arrow, knife or firearm may intensify the attack, and killing a grizzly on the attack is difficult at best. If you have to shoot a grizzly in self-defense, take careful aim and attempt to knock it down by hitting major bones in the front shoulders. Leave the scene immediately and report the incident to Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

As a last resort, if attacked, play dead. Lie face down, covering your neck and head with your hands and arms. If you have a backpack leave it on to protect your back. Stay face down, never look at the bear and remain still until the bear is gone. Many people have survived bear attacks using this method.

F. Retrieving game meat out of bear country

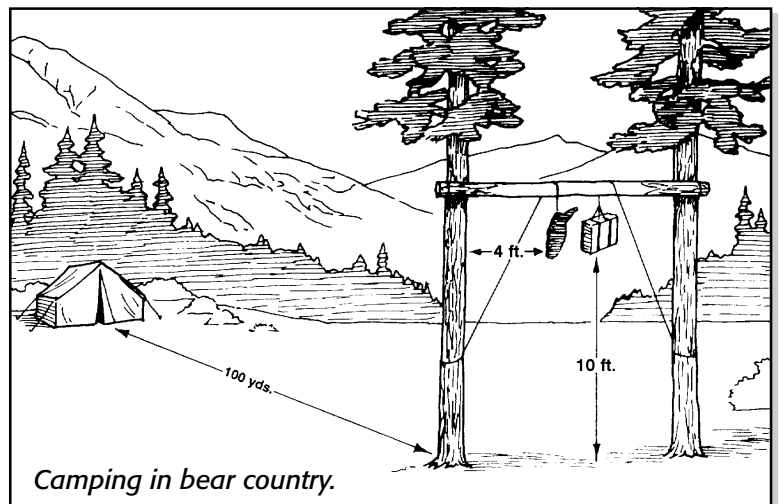
The golden rule to retrieving game meat in bear country is “get that elk or deer out of the area as quickly as possible.” The longer a carcass remains lying on the ground, hung up in hunting camp, or in the back of a truck, the more likely it is to attract a bear.

If you do have to leave a carcass for a period of time, follow these special precautions:

- 🦌 Carry a colored, lightweight tarp or space blanket. Put the guts on the tarp and drag them as far away from the carcass as possible. Then, taking care not to drip blood on your return trip, use the tarp to cover the carcass. This will reduce the scent trail from the gut pile to the carcass, and discourage birds’ and a bears’ attention to the carcass.
- 🦌 Locate an observation point 200 yards (or as far away as possible) from the carcass with a clear line of sight. Before leaving, walk to the observation point and memorize the site.
- 🦌 When returning, approach the observation point carefully. With binoculars study the scene from the observation point and scan the area for the carcass and any movement.
 - If a grizzly bear is at the site and refuses to leave or the meat has been covered with debris by a bear and is not salvageable, report the incident to Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Hunters who have lost an animal to a grizzly may be eligible for another license.

Do not attempt to frighten away or haze a grizzly that does not leave a carcass!

- 🦌 If you live in grizzly country, do not hang carcasses near the house or garage for extended periods. Big game carcasses stored outside should be hung from a pulley attached to a stout 15-foot-long “meat pole” that is at least 25 feet off the ground. The lowest portion of the elk or deer should be swinging from the center of the pole and should be at least 10 feet off the ground. Grizzly and black bears have been known to climb trees and stand on objects in order to reach attractants.



Chapter Nine Quiz

1. Treestand accidents can be avoided by: (Mark the correct answers.)
☐ wearing a fall-resistant device.
☐ selecting a suitable tree for your stand.
☐ keeping at least three points of contact.
☐ using a haul line to raise and lower your gear.

2. A responsible hunter using an ATV should: (Mark the correct answers.)
☐ travel only where permitted.
☐ avoid mud, water and steep banks.
☐ chase animals.
☐ be courteous to others.
☐ ignore rules and regulations.

3. To prevent shooting accidents while turkey hunting: (Mark the correct answers.)
☐ wear red, white or blue.
☐ positively identify your target.
☐ never stalk a turkey or turkey sounds.
☐ protect your back.
☐ don't preselect a zone of fire before shooting.
☐ shoot at sounds or movements that might be a turkey.
☐ choose safe and ethical hunting companions.
☐ shout "STOP!" to alert approaching hunters.

4. Hair color and body size can be misleading in telling the difference between a black bear and a grizzly bear.
☐ true
☐ false

5. The following combination of characteristics should be used to tell the difference between a black bear and a grizzly bear. (Choose only one combination.)
☐ Hair color, body size, claws
☐ Facial profile, ear shape, presence of shoulder hump
☐ Body size, ear shape, hair color